USDA
United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

Conservation Beyond Boundaries **MRBI**

Known as "America's River," the Mississippi River is North America's largest river, flowing over 2,300 miles through America's heartland to the Gulf of Mexico. The watershed not only provides drinking water, food, industry, and recreation for millions of people, it also hosts a globally significant migratory flyway and home for over 325 bird species.

This vital river's elevated levels of nutrients and sediment can impair these uses and impact the quality of life for the tens of millions of people who live in and rely on the Mississippi River basin and contributes to the Gulf of Mexico hypoxic zone. To address agricultural sources of nutrients and sediment to the river, NRCS works with farmers and conservation partners to implement conservation practices that help trap sediment and reduce runoff of nutrients to improve the overall health of the Mississippi River and help reduce hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico.

Cover crops help improve water quality and soil health and control soil loss.

NRCS and the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

Launched in 2009, the 13-state Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative uses several Farm Bill programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, to help landowners adopt conservation systems that conserve America's natural resources while ensuring economic viability of agricultural lands.

States within the Mississippi River basin have developed nitrogen and phosphorus reduction strategies, focusing efforts within smaller watersheds that have the greatest opportunity to reduce the contributions of nitrogen and phosphorus to surface waters within the basin, and ultimately to the Gulf of Mexico.

Conservation systems implemented in these areas reduce the amount of nutrients flowing from agricultural land into waterways, curb erosion and improve the resiliency of working lands in the face of droughts and floods.

NRCS Goals

NRCS developed edge-of-field pollutant reductions goals for MRBI to show progress in supporting the states' nutrient reductions strategies. MRBI will reduce sediment loss by 1.9 million tons, phosphorous loss by 2.85 million pounds, and nitrogen loss by 9.5 million pounds on cropland across all MRBI watersheds, and apply nutrient management on 500,000 acres by 2018.

To achieve these goals, NRCS will work with farmers and ranchers in priority watersheds to implement conservation practices such as cover crops, reduced tillage, waste management and wetland restoration. Each MRBI project has specific goals and metrics to track progress at the watershed scale. These goals and metrics are dependent on the watershed characteristics and landuse, pollutants of concern, and partner objectives. Every project contributes in different ways to the overall goals of the Initiative.

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

Overall Summary

	# Contracts	Total Treated Acres	Obligation
FY10-14	5,437	986,986	202,439,461
FY15	757	113,050	28,177,404
TOTAL FY10-15	6,194	1,100,035	260,616,865

Outcomes and Impacts

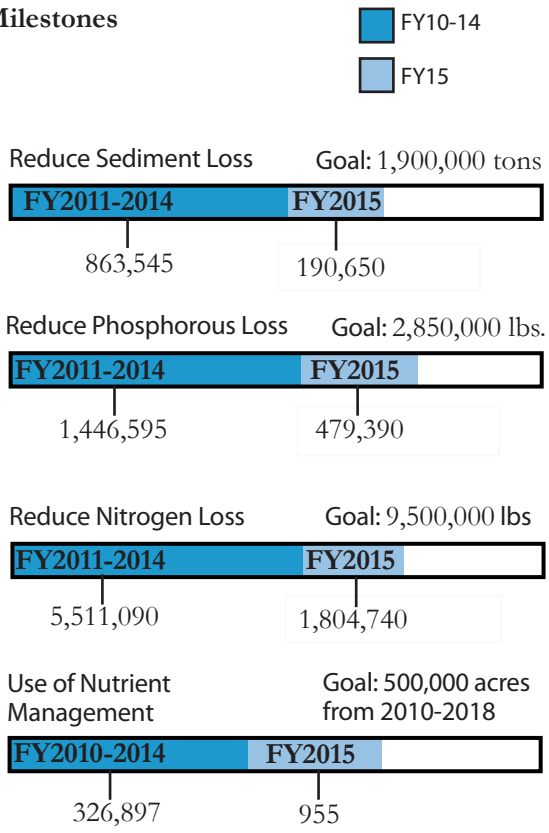
MRBI has shown that focused water quality efforts in high priority areas can be effective in building strong partners, increase trust and partnerships with landowners and farmers, and get more conservation systems on the ground.

Targeted investments have quadrupled the adoption of critical water quality conservation practices, such as cover crops, tillage and residue management, grassed waterways and nutrient management, in MRBI high priority watersheds. This targeted approach increases the effectiveness of conservation systems on a per-acre basis, resulting in greater reductions in nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment leaving farms.

Fiscal Year 2015 Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative NRCS Financial Assistance (EQIP FA) for Active and Completed Contracts

State	Contracts	Acres	NRCS Investment
Arkansas	140	25850.55	$7,219,433
Illinois	21	1781.9	$557,824
Indiana	18	4258.8	$788,299
Iowa	30	2750.2	$747,179
Kentucky	12	3018.4	$257,033
Louisiana	4	990	$127,922
Minnesota	9	968.4	$102,954
Mississippi	206	31487.9	$9,013,449
Missouri	180	20123	$5,882,687
Ohio	12	1213	$1,160,794
South Dakota	16	7934.3	$499,887
Tennessee	91	10769.3	$1,497,600
Wisconsin	18	1904.1	$322,343
TOTAL	757	113049.85	$28,177,404

Milestones



For more information, visit nrcs.usda.gov/initiatives

Helping People Help the Land